

Tough Hard Core**Reds Active
In Central
America****By Al Burt***The Miami Herald*

GUATEMALA CITY—Communism speaks directly to some 10,000 hard-core followers in Panama and Central America. And this organized strength feeds on the sympathy of between 60,000 and 75,000 fringe believers.



Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala have the Communist danger inside their houses, and they know it. The Communist strength runs to students and laborers, and thrives on domestic situations that create widespread dissatisfaction. Unemployment, lack of freedom, government corruption, and the miseries of the poor and illiterate are their favorite poison.

In general, Fidel Castro has lost his messiah's license, but sympathy still exists for the Cuban revolution. There is a feeling that Russia and Cuba have lost more prestige in the current crisis than the United States did in the Cuban Bay of Pigs invasion fiasco in 1961. But optimism is tempered by the knowledge that each country has its own crop of Communists eager to make a new Cuba.

In capsule, the countries line up like this:

Panama—Estimated hard-core Communist strength: 1000. Sympathizers: 10,000 to 20,000. Strong influence at the university, among labor. Affected by unemployment, concentration of wealth and power. United States-Panama friction over the Panama Canal. Justice Minister Marco Robles: "Panama is the most important objective of the Communists because of the canal." A Robles crackdown during the Cuban crisis kept unrest at a minimum.

Costa Rica—Estimated hard-core strength: 300. Sympathizers: 10,000 to 20,000. Strong pitch for banana workers and trying to organize peasant leagues among the campesinos. Problem regarded as less serious here, proportionately, but an "elite" Communist group is making strong effort. Government has support of people.

Nicaragua—Estimated hard-core strength: 1000. Sympathizers: 10,000 to 20,000 and growing. Strong among students and laborers. May 1 parade drew 6000 protesting against the United States for Cuba. Take advantage of widespread unrest resulting from 26 years of rule by one family, the Somozas. Working in 18-25 age bracket who have never voted and have no political affiliation.

Honduras—Estimated hard-core strength: 2000 to 5000. Sympathizers: about 10 times that number. Effectiveness rises and falls directly with Cuba's fortunes. Down now. Honduras has reputation of being most heavily infiltrated of the six countries. The government says this is exaggerated. Take advantage of economic problems, particularly unemployment, of underdeveloped country. Government pushing social reforms.

El Salvador—Estimated hard-core strength: 1000. Sympathizers: at least 5000. Principal threat in urban areas with Communist-front organizations among labor, teacher, student groups. Strong government cracks down hard. Anti-subversion law passed, this fall gives broad police powers, provides up to seven years in jail. In September, government headed off trouble by grabbing agitating leaders, hustling them to airport and sending them out of country. Take advantage of over-population problem in small country. Government critics complain police work goes beyond efficiency.

Guatemala—Estimated hard-core strength: 1500 to 2000. Sympathizers: 5000. Take advantage of discontent with present government. Strength in rural areas. Popular support in rural areas for return of former President Juan Arevalo, generally blamed with leading country into communism before. Previous Communist experience makes literate wary, but illiteracy high.